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BLACKBOARD DRAWING.

A PERSONAL REMINISCENCE.

A SONG, WITH PIANO ACCOMPANIMENT.

STATE NORMAL SCHOOL AT WORCESTER, MASSACHUSETTS.

Pamphlet D.

THE PLATFORM EXERCISE — ORAL EXPRESSION.

As preliminary to the descriptive account which is to follow, it seems necessary to explain, briefly, the need of some such training in oral expression as that attempted here, in order to justify the rather liberal expenditure of time which this feature of our school requires.

Need for Practice in Oral Expression. — It is obvious that no profession or calling involves a more constant use of the mother tongue than teaching. Especially at the present time, when so much of the instruction in all schools is oral, a teacher should possess an easy command of correct, idiomatic, colloquial speech. It need not be said how far short of this cardinal qualification the "average" teacher falls. Such education as she has received at High school, or even college, although it may have done much for her *writing*, has left her *speech* mostly at loose ends, with often a tendency towards the formal and pedantic. She is as yet young; she has not probably read much good literature, and as a rule has not enjoyed the advantage of social surroundings of a sort calculated to correct or refine her language. If city bred, she may possibly have heard at home only a foreign tongue spoken, or, more commonly, an "English" so warped by dialectic peculiarities and vitiated by slang as to handicap for many years all efforts to improve it. Under such conditions, it is easy to see that writing is a more manageable art to teach than speech, for the reason that it is far less practiced out of school and is therefore much less liable to corruption by bad or careless usage. We find, accord-

ingly, as a matter of experience, that a large proportion of the High school graduates who come to the Normal school to prepare for teaching are noticeably more proficient in written than in spoken language. And yet, when it comes to actual work in the schoolroom, good speech is a far more essential accomplishment than good writing. One of the latest foreign critics of American schools, Mr. Alfred Mosely, head of the Mosely Commission which visited us last autumn, says plainly, in a recent magazine article, "If American teaching fails in any respect it is in the matter of inculcating the power of correct and accurate English speech." * Fifty years ago the oral form of language, in both reading and speaking, received more attention in school and college than it does at present, while writing was much less practiced. Thus it has come about that the teacher of to-day needs most that form of language in which she has been trained least. This puts upon Normal and Training schools a heavy burden, for good speech is a plant of slow growth.

What we call, in the Normal school at Worcester, for want of a more descriptive name, *the platform exercise*, is an attempt to meet the need above described. It gives much practice in extemporaneous speaking, of a character but little raised above the conversational level, and it also serves incidentally, as will be seen presently, to broaden and enrich the general knowledge and refine the tastes of our students in many desirable directions.

Description of the Exercise. — The exercise consists chiefly of speaking for a few minutes, with or without notes, to the assembled school from the platform of the main hall. The range of topics is unlimited, and the choice in each case rests wholly with the student who gives the exercise. The teachers have no hand in the selection or preparation of it. It may be a personal reminiscence, a piece of interesting news, a phenomenon observed in nature, a scientific fact or law, an account of a book read or a picture seen, an observation in morals or manners, a curious object or process described and illustrated, a short literary selection read, a story told, a song

* *The World's Work*, February, 1904, p. 4487.

sung, a piece of music played on some instrument, a blackboard drawing made on the spot, a game exhibited, a gymnastic exercise or the figure of a dance gone through — in short, there is no limit to the range and variety of what is thus done, except the ingenuity of the student (see "wing-frames" 6 and 7, and the appended stenographic reports). It is not uncommon for two or more students to combine and give a connected or "team" exercise, as it is called. It will be noticed from the above enumeration — which, by the way, does not cover a tenth part of the scope which these exercises take — that the oral element is not invariably present. It is *usually* predominant; in every exercise, however, the student *presents* something to the teachers and pupils (and often visitors) before her, something individual, characteristic, chosen and prepared by herself.

Time Limit. — A strict limitation of time is observed, no exercise being permitted to occupy more than four, or at most, five minutes, unless interrupted by questions or prolonged by unforeseen explanations. The disciplinary value of this restriction will be evident to all teachers. It compels careful selection of telling points, forbids digression and repetition, and strongly encourages directness and precision of statement.

Constant attention is required to keep the exercise upon the colloquial plane in manner, diction and tone. The distinction between good speech and speech-making is never lost sight of. The rhetorical and oratorical must be avoided. All manifestations of mannerism and affectation, all approaches to the grandiose, are gently but firmly nipped in the bud. To this end, as well as to accustom the future teacher to what will constantly occur in the schoolroom, every discourse is open to instant interruption by any teacher, with a question or comment or suggestion; in fact, an exercise rarely goes through without some such arrest, which serves often to check the momentum that might otherwise carry the speaker into too declamatory or impassioned or otherwise unnatural a style (see stenographic reports).

Criticism. — But it should be added that a student on the platform is but sparingly criticised or corrected, almost never during his performance. It is held that the position in which he stands is quite trying enough, and that his inevitable agitation of mind at the moment should shield him from everything calculated to increase it. Of course, glaring errors of fact or form ought not to pass unnoticed, but the notice taken of them may be directed somewhat obliquely so as to fall upon the slip made rather than upon the person who makes it; and again, the fault may be generalized or treated as one liable to occur to anybody, not peculiar to the person who happens to have fallen into it at the time. Moreover, the form of the criticism may make it a mild warning to the listening students, who thereby seem to take a large share of the responsibility from the shoulders of the individual who has occasioned it.

A Voluntary Exercise. — The exercise is not compulsory. Every student is free to elect *whether* and *what* and *when*. Volunteers put their names in a box when they are ready; the box is shaken at the beginning of the daily exercise, and a sufficient number of names drawn to fill the allotted time, which never exceeds forty minutes. Six or eight individuals may appear each day. The volunteering, as may be supposed, is sometimes spirited and sometimes slack, but it should be said that no student has ever passed through the school without appearing in any exercise at all.

Attitude of Students toward the Exercise. — It is quite significant that, notwithstanding its obviously trying character and the fact that a way of escape is always open, the platform exercise is and has always been one of the two or three most valued that the school offers, and its popularity with the students grows with their growing maturity throughout the three years' course and really culminates only when the graduates look back upon the exercise in after years. Their explicit testimony to this is unequivocal and almost unanimous.

The most striking evidence that this discipline accomplishes in a good degree the purpose for which it is main-

tained is afforded by the fact that each class in the school shows a distinct gain in precision, ease, and effectiveness of speech over the class next below it; the seniors, for example, always taking the lead, and the pupils in their first term following at a long distance behind.

STENOGRAPHIC REPORTS. — The examples which follow are from stenographic reports of exercises as they were given from day to day, with substantially "all their imperfections on their heads." They are intended to be fairly, though they are not and cannot be fully, representative of the exercise — they certainly do not represent it as better than it is. It need not be said that many of the most characteristic exercises, particularly music, reading, and such as were addressed wholly or in large part to the eye, cannot be reproduced here, so that the present exhibition of this feature of our training is necessarily somewhat maimed and shorn. But it is hoped that the interested reader will not fail to catch something both of its form and spirit.

MISS S. (SENIOR CLASS). When we were in the third class Mr. R. began to criticise our English very strongly. Since that time I have tried to improve my English, and I think I have succeeded somewhat, although I still "bring" a book home instead of "carrying" it. When I was out apprenticing, I asked various teachers to whom I was appointed if I might take the English, and in every case, with one exception, it was given me.

In the lowest grades we used various devices to get the children to talk, and at times combined nature study with the English lesson, but my efforts to get the children to talk well for any length of time seemed fruitless. It was rather discouraging, for, day after day, pupils would come to me and say, "I ain't any paper," or "I ain't got no book." I couldn't expect anything different from most of these children, because I knew they were accustomed to hear poor English spoken at home.

A TEACHER. How old were they?

MISS S. This was true of every room I was in, from the first up to the eighth grade.

A TEACHER. It was about the same for all the grades?

MISS S. Yes; I don't think they had improved any — not to any extent in the eighth grade. I was just going to speak about that. I couldn't expect anything from them, for I knew that most of them came from poor homes where poor language was spoken.

THE PRINCIPAL. Poor homes are not the only homes where poor language is spoken.

Miss S. Well, they heard it on the streets, and often in the schoolroom.

The Principal. I have heard it said that "on the street" isn't a very good phrase, but it is almost universally used.

Miss S. In my general lessons I felt that I could not criticise the English as much as I would like to, without repressing originality and freedom of speech, to a certain extent. Then I could not criticise a bashful or timid child who found courage to tell me that he "et a quail once that his father shooted." In the eighth grade I thought that the children here would apply their knowledge of English grammar to their everyday language. In this I was mistaken, for most of the children could readily analyze sentences in which pronouns in the objective case occurred (gives examples). If I should stop and ask them to parse the word "whom" and give its case and number, they could do it very readily. Yet they will always say, "Who did you give that book to"?

A Teacher. I heard a boy say of his teacher, "She told he and I to go."

Miss S. At first I think I took a wrong view of the matter. I was inclined to criticise, and inferred that these children were below an eighth grade standing. Then I thought of myself in the eighth grade. I don't believe I knew why I studied grammar. I know I liked to parse, and analyze sentences, but I don't believe I ever tried to apply my grammar in any way.

A Teacher. I don't believe many try to do that. It is very difficult to do that really. There doesn't seem to be any time or opportunity to apply it. The thing is done before you know that you've made any mistake, for the most part.

Miss S. As I remember, it wasn't until my junior year in the high school that I began to think of my English. At that time I studied Cæsar — the third year in Latin — and it was during that study that I first became conscious of the value of grammar. I began to drill continuously in words as well as sentences. From that time on I think I began to put my knowledge into practice, but more in writing than in speaking.

I thought of this subject a great deal about that time, but I didn't get much light on the subject until I read a paper that was suggested and discussed when I was started well in the apprentice class. This was a paper by Samuel Thurber, entitled, I think, "Admonitions as to Primary Teaching of English." He assumes, as most people do who have thought about the matter, that language depends on habit. (Reads several passages from the article.)

Miss B. (Apprentice Class). The children here seem to get more enjoyment out of the spelling lesson than out of any other lesson, I think, that is given in this room. Ten words are taken from the list in the spelling-book, and put on the board each morning. When the time for studying the spelling comes, each class has a special study-period set aside each morning; they study not only

the spelling of the words, but they look up the meaning of each word in the dictionary, and prepare sentences to write in the afternoon.

THE PRINCIPAL. Is each child provided with a dictionary?

MISS B. Yes, Mr. R. Just before the written lesson, in the afternoon, the children may ask any question about any word in the spelling lesson, if they don't understand the meaning of the word, or if there are two or three meanings given to a word they have the chance to ask the teacher which meaning they may take.

THE PRINCIPAL. Can you give us any specimen words, Miss B., so that we can get a notion of the difficulty of the spelling in this grade — perhaps you can't easily recollect any?

MISS B. Seamstress, architect, artisan, mechanic, — or any of those words. Then, five of those words are given out and each write their sentences on the paper. The sentences must be written so that the reader will understand the meaning of the word, but the sentences must not be definitions. If a child writes a definition for the word, to use as a sentence, that sentence will be marked wrong — it is not really wrong, but it is not what is wanted. The other five words are given orally.

Friday afternoon, exercises are carried on differently from any I have ever seen before. They consist chiefly of recitation of poetry — perhaps Longfellow's poems — I think those are the poems that are most usually given; and sentences they have learned; and once or twice some of the boys have ventured to tell about some war. They have regular maps here, campaign maps, and they can develop any campaign they please.

THE PRINCIPAL. A sort of "platform exercise"?

MISS B. Yes — but it is somewhat different from our platform exercise here because the children have formed themselves into a club, and they call themselves "The Friday Afternoon Club." A special committee is appointed to look after the exercises. The children may choose their own exercises, but they must be shown to the committee, and a record is kept of them.

THE PRINCIPAL. How is the committee chosen?

MISS B. I think from what they tell me that they are chosen some afternoon by themselves. There is a president, a vice-president, and a secretary. The president takes charge of the school, after recess. He takes charge, standing in front of the desks, facing the school, and calls the meeting to order. Then he asks if there is any business to come up before the meeting.

A TEACHER. Well, is there?

MISS B. Sometimes. They may have any kind of business they wish come up before this meeting. It may be connected with school matters, or it may be something outside. If the president is to take part in the programme he leaves his chair and asks the vice-president to come forward. The secretary keeps an account of everything that happens during the meeting and reads it at the next meeting.

So metimes there are different pupils who haven't their parts ready, and they have to stand up and give their reasons before the club. They are held responsible for the time for each Friday afternoon, and they know the time they must come on. If they don't, they have to make their excuses in public.

THE PRINCIPAL. There is no penalty other than that, I suppose?

MISS B. No, Mr. R., other than that. This seems to work pretty well, for they don't seem to like to get up and give an excuse before the whole club.

MISS T. (SECOND CLASS.) In 1636, Jonathan Fairbanks came from Surrey, England, to Boston, bringing with him a wife, six children, and the timbers for a house. He left them all in Boston, and looked around to find a place to build his house. It took him three years to find this place, and he decided on what was then called "Contentment," but which is now Dedham, Massachusetts. The main part of the house he built himself, and he lived there until his son Jonathan married. Then he built one wing —

THE PRINCIPAL. He added a wing to the house?

MISS T. Yes. In the course of time Jonathan's son Jonathan married, and the second wing of the house was built. That house is still standing. I lived in it last summer. It is in a fairly good state of preservation, and a good deal of the older part of the house is left, although some modern improvements have been made upon it. The main part of the house is entered by a door — not in the middle of the house, as is usually the case, but upon one side; and as you enter this low door you have to bend your head before you can get into the very small entry-way. This entry-way has five doors leading out of it. In the kitchen there is a large fireplace — that is, in the main kitchen of the house; but there was, I think, another kitchen called a "summer kitchen" — a long, low, unfinished room.

The descendants of Jonathan Fairbanks will get a good deal of the history of Massachusetts in reading the lives of these men. One of his ancestors —

THE PRINCIPAL. You don't mean "ancestor," do you? Don't you mean descendant?

MISS T. Yes, descendant. This descendant, Jonas, born in 1657, was fined a certain sum because he wore top-boots before he was worth two hundred pounds, sterling.

There were a great many names in the family beginning with J. you will notice — Jonathan, Jonas, and Jabez, as you might notice. Jabez was a great fighter, and in the family of the Fairbankses, when anything comes up in the family in the way of temper, or one shows a disposition to fight, he is always reminded of "Fighting Jabez."

It seems that during King Philip's War, he was of valuable service where he lived, in Lancaster, and later on, the government appointed him as lieutenant at Groton. Among the old records are his papers which were sent to the government telling about the positions of the Indians, for he frequently acted as a sort of spy for the government upon the Indians.

Another story is told about a deacon further down the line. He is said to have occupied a seat, according to his standing, in the front row in the meeting-house. It seems that when the meeting-house was reseated he was placed the ninth in order in the seats, but in the first row. A little later, the records tell, he got up to the first seat, and his son was given the third.

THE PRINCIPAL. The present United States Senator Fairbanks, from the State of Indiana, is a descendant of this same family; and at the celebration of the 250th anniversary of the settlement of the town of Lancaster, in this county, last June, Senator Fairbanks was the orator of the occasion.

MISS T. The descendants of this Fairbanks family have had two family re-unions in Dedham, in this old house.

MISS L. (FOURTH CLASS). Since we began the study of trees I have been interested in observing the different kinds of trees that grow in our woods.

THE PRINCIPAL. Do you mean the woods in this region, or just the woods around your own home?

MISS L. Yes, sir, the woods around my own home; and I was surprised to find such a great variety. I found thirty-three different kinds.

A TEACHER. By "kinds" I suppose you mean species?

MISS L. Yes, species. They were the shagbark hickory, the chestnut, the chestnut-oak, red-oak, black-oak, white-oak, red-maple, rock-maple, striped-maple, white-ash, black-ash, mountain-ash, red-cherry, black-cherry, white-birch, paper-birch, yellow-birch, poplar, hemlock, white-pine, spruce, red-cedar, elm, ironwood, dogwood, sugarplum, June-berry, wild pear, scarlet-fruited thorn, sumach, walnut, beech, pitch-pine.

THE PRINCIPAL. All those, do you mean, you have found near your own house?

MISS L. Yes, sir; and I can tell twenty-one of these by their bark alone.

A TEACHER. What poplar is it that you mentioned?

MISS L. The aspen poplar.

A TEACHER. I suppose, what is sometimes called the American aspen.

MISS L. All the rest I told, some by their branches, some by remembering where they stood when I got my leaf collection in the fall.

THE PRINCIPAL. When you made your leaf collection last fall you identified them by their leaves?

MISS L. Yes, sir.

THE PRINCIPAL. Now, Miss L., how many of these did you know when you were, say, ten or a dozen years old, should you think, for a guess?

MISS L. I think I knew about ten.

A TEACHER. You don't speak of the pignut?

MISS L. It doesn't grow in our woods.

A TEACHER. How about the sloe?

MISS L. That doesn't grow there, either.

A TEACHER. How about the alder?

MISS L. Yes, I think that does grow there.

THE PRINCIPAL. Is that a tree?

MISS L. No, I think not; and sumach isn't a tree, either.

A TEACHER. And the Amelanchier or sugar-plum is generally considered a shrub; but there is no broad and sure line of demarkation between shrubs and trees.